



Sermon for the 13th Sunday after Pentecost, August 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14, Psalm 111, Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6:51-58](#)

Creator God, you fill us with goodness and hope. Help us have the courage to discover in ourselves greater wisdom, greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another. May we dedicate our lives to what matters and what lasts, always trusting in your eternal presence and love. Amen.

One of the themes connecting today's readings is wisdom. Beginning with the Old Testament lesson from 1 Kings. "... the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." I think that Solomon already was wise! He could have asked for ALL of those things associated with the power of a king; wealth and domination of others, or for long life. But Solomon asked God for an, "understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil." God granted Solomon what he asked for AND the things not asked for, "riches and honor all your life;" God said, "no other king shall compare with you." But there was a caveat, "If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

The wisdom theme is there again in verse 10 of Psalm 111, "... fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; those who act accordingly have a good understanding..." I have read that 'awe' is a better translation than 'fear.' Maybe the beginning of wisdom is to be in awe of God; to love God with reverential affection, and to willingly obey God's commandments. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself.

Paul had words of wisdom for the Ephesians, too. "Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is..." Paul then gave specific examples but the summary is the same. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself.

Now imagine this cartoon: Four young men are sitting at writing desks. Their instructor, looking sternly at three of them, says, "Matthew, Mark and Luke, come to my office after class. Your reports are very similar!" The fourth young man is John and we know with certainty that the Gospel according to John is not like the others. John expands our understanding of Jesus using stories and sayings that are not written elsewhere. Some scholars call John's gospel the "most mystic of all the gospels" and a "treasure house of psychological wisdom."

Chapter 6 of John's Gospel marks a pivot in Jesus' ministry from the height of his popularity and acceptance by huge crowds to the worst incidents of people taking offense, rejecting his teachings and walking away. From the feeding of the 5000 in verses 1 through 13 to the end of today's reading, bread is the connecting thread.

In last week's gospel reading Jesus said, "I am the bread of life ... I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." Some people complained, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" This week we read, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews argued among themselves asking, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Next week, we will learn that Jesus said these and more disturbing things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. Even his disciples were appalled.

Imagine. What might someone walking into a church for the first time and hearing these verses think? "... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life ... for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them ... whoever eats me will live because of me."

If they are a literalist, yikes -- sounds like cannibalism! To those who follow kosher dietary restrictions (clean/unclean) drinking blood and eating human flesh is wrong. Even for those of us thinking metaphorically, the words of Jesus are challenging. But metaphorical thinking is where I am, because when I only think literally I cannot appreciate the nuanced images of Christ presented throughout the New Testament. If we open our imaginations, each vision of Christ brings us closer to an amazing reality.

- An angel told Mary, "... the child to be born will be called Son of God."
- Jesus calls himself the "Son of Man."
- The church is the "Body of Christ."
- We are flesh and blood members of the Body of Christ, each of us with unique gifts.

We know that bread is a basic, staple food in every world culture and blood is a life force. You have heard that Jesus is living bread, the Word made flesh, Immanuel, God with us; the light of the world; the resurrection; the way, the truth and the life; the door; the gate, the good shepherd; the Messiah; the true vine." Who is Jesus for you?

Good and gracious God, help us to be open to discovery as we experience being very members incorporate in the mystical Body of Christ. Feed us in these holy mysteries with spiritual food. May we praise your name and show your love to the world, not only with our lips, but in our lives. Amen.

